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SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITIES OF JUDAISM TO-DAY.

THE history of a community, like the history of an individual, is marked by the recurrence of periods of self-consciousness and self-analysis. At such times its members consider their aggregate achievements and failures, and mark the tendencies of their corporate life. Perhaps even, the sudden recognition of facts which have been unconsciously suppressed may lead to regeneration. For many years self-consciousness has been growing among English Jews, and they have expressed, in whispers to one another, dissatisfaction with their spiritual state. It requires, however, some stirring accident like the Conference on Religious Education held in June last, and the East End meetings resulting from it, to cause an effective diagnosis to be made. Until Jews are honest enough to recognize that the majority of them are either devoted to ceremonialism at the expense of religion, or indifferent both to ceremonialism and to religion; until they have energy to examine their religious needs and courage to formulate them, they are courting comfort at the expense of truth, and they must fail to restore to Judaism its life and the endless possibilities inherent in life.

It is not enough for us to give a frightened glance of recognition at our materialism and spiritual lethargy, and then seek to draw the veil in all speed, hoping impotently that grim facts will grow less grim if left alone. We have ultimately to confess that facts cannot be thus set aside by mere desire. Moreover, these facts prove on examination to be stimulating rather than terrifying, fraught with hope

rather than with negation. If I appear dogmatic in my efforts to prove my contention that Judaism has been allowed by the timid and the indifferent to lose much of its inspiring force, I can only plead in excuse the sincerity of my convictions.

I take as the objects of my criticism the two most comprehensive types of English Jews, and for purposes of convenience call them "East End Jews" and "West End Jews" respectively. It must, however, be clearly understood that these two forms of religion do not prevail exclusively in any particular district of London. Representatives of both classes may sometimes live in the same house, and may, conceivably, belong to the same family. Again, a considerable district in West Central London is largely inhabited by "East End Jews," and many "West End Jews," with their vague ineffective aspirations, crowd the neighbourhood of Bishopsgate. But these epithets are intended to convey the idea of two sets of people, differing less in dogmatic belief than in the tone and temper of their minds, and especially in their view of the proper relations between religion and life. It will also be shown that, although these two classes are to-day quite unsympathetic to one another there are many signs of a better mutual understanding among members of the younger generation; and it is chiefly upon this reunion that I base my own belief in the possibilities of the reanimation of Judaism as a religious force. In my endeavour to rouse the lethargic I may perhaps have dwelt more fully on the defects of my two "types" than on their qualities, but I have little doubt that there will be many both able and willing to make the balance more even.

The "East End Jew," whose religion is vigorous in spite of its deformities, has no confidence in the shadowy faith of the "West End Jew," and refuses to be taught by "West End" methods. Examining this distrust, I find that it arises from the recognition of the dissimilarity in the two religions. The "East End Jew" is determined to follow

the worship of his fathers, and spurns the flaccid religion of his "West End" brothers. To the pious "East End Jew" religion is obedience glorified into a cult; for him, God exists as a just Law-giver, ready to forgive and help those who obey the Law, delivered by him to his people through his servant Moses, and having misfortune and failure in reserve for the rebellious and indifferent. He is continuously conscious of the "God without," whom he seeks to approach at prescribed times and seasons. Every act of obedience tends to increase the sum of his righteousness; no evil can touch him while pursuing the divine mandate. He does not consciously strive to realize the "God within," and to develop it by communion with the divine Ideal of Truth and Love existing without, for the idea of an immanent divine presence does not seem to affect his creed. When he repeats the prayers ordered by his fathers, he is less stirred by the effort of the soul to hold communion with the Infinite than by a sense of righteousness resulting from unquestioning obedience. The glow which this obedience produces, suffuses his daily life, and encourages him to persevere in his rigid observances, and to face all earthly difficulties with courage and hope. Can we wonder that the "East End Jew" regards with half-scornful fear the man who, while still calling himself "Jew," ventures to neglect the ordinances prescribed of old, and makes no apparent sacrifice in the cause of his faith? For him, prosperity seems to authorize self-indulgence and laxity of conduct.

Admitting the possibility that prejudice and ignorance render the "East End" observer unappreciative in his criticism, can we substantiate for the "West End Jew" any claim to a deeply religious life? Can we deny that in many "West End" homes, callousness takes the place which religion should occupy? Having been born Jews, and believing it more respectable to be identified with some religion, the members of the class under consideration generally belong to some synagogue, and perhaps attend the

services more or less regularly. But their religion is seldom interesting, never absorbing to them. They are far more concerned in the length of the service than in its adequacy to satisfy their spiritual needs. They make no demand on their Judaism; it has no real influence over them. They either sink into materialism or create a religion of their own, based on a vague belief in the existence of a higher law, and nourished by an exacting moral sense which requires self-restraint and self-development. This religion, without an historical past and admitting of no outward embodiment, is helpful only to those individuals whose moral strength is great enough to call it into existence. The vast majority of men and women need a more definite cult to draw them to their God. The strict system of religious discipline adopted in the "East End" has much definite and salutary influence. It awakens veneration and instigates self-sacrifice; it leads to morality, sobriety and strength of purpose. It encourages kindly intercourse between men, inducing often heroic acts of charity. I only venture to criticize it, because I see it worshipped as God alone should be worshipped; because true communion with God is being shut off from man by the observances which were intended to lead man to God. Even the recent remarkable gatherings of working Jews, bent on Sabbath observance, do not allay our apprehension for the future of Judaism. While admiring the earnestness which inspired these meetings, it is to be feared that the Sabbath, instead of being desired as a day for the renewal of spiritual life, or as a stimulus to moral progress, is now required for mere physical rest and idleness, and for the complete equipment of the ritual-god, which has been fashioned so curiously and is so generally worshipped. Indeed I tremble for the future of Judaism, as I recall the words that Isaiah addresses, in the name of the Lord, to the idolaters of all ages: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them" (Isa. i. 14).

Between the worship of ritual prevalent in the "East End," inspiring by its intense fervour, but repelling through the materialism and intolerance which it produces, and the vague religion of the "West End," existing apparently but to satisfy a convention, there seems indeed little affinity. Yet the children of both types of Jews are united by a common need which neither form of religion is able to satisfy. For the sons of the pious "East End Jew" are also beginning to question the meaning and value of the laws which bind their fathers' lives so closely. We see them shocked by their inconsistency, and disappointed by their inadequacy; we see them drifting away from the worship which, at least in its origin, was inspiring, and, for want of some better object, devoting themselves to "self." The daughters of the pious do not even attend the synagogue services, which have begun to weary their brothers. Through force of habit they cling to the domestic side of religion, but they do not attempt to ennoble the sordid elements in their lives by trying to introduce the ideal.

Similarly, when the children of the indifferent "West End Jews" have passed the period when the example of parents is followed without question, when they begin to think for themselves, they realize that they have no religion. The majority accept, after a period of uncertainty, the conventional pretences of their parents, and adhere to them until they become inconvenient, when they cast them off altogether. Many of the young men and women have periods of intense craving for some definite faith, and would even return to the Ghetto-worship if their minds could admit its principles. Perhaps they have glimpses, which fill them with extreme joy and hope, of a revived and ennobling Judaism, which might become the guiding inspiration of their lives. A few retain these visions, and are continually cheered by them; a very few seek to realize them more closely; the many prefer to banish disquieting dreams; and in choosing for the hour peace of mind, cut off for ever real happiness—

spiritual joy, the best of the gifts which God offers to his children.

In what way does the community attempt to meet the needs of its younger members, in whom the hope of Judaism in the future rests, and to stay the current of indifference which, both in the "East End" and in the "West End," is threatening its foundations? Among some of the better educated parents who are conscious of their responsibilities, there is noticeable an ominous bewilderment, when they consider what form of religious instruction they are to give to their children. If they send them to religious classes at the synagogues, or if they arrange for masters to give private instruction, the success of their efforts depends generally on the personal force and influence of the teachers. The children are further required to attend the synagogue services, but these have no hold over their growing life. As a rule, they are inattentive; and if they pray at all, it is that the prayers may speedily end. The occasional introduction of a children's sermon does not for them materially relieve the tedium of the service. A preacher who speaks to a mixed congregation of adults and children is generally self-conscious, and his words are often addressed to unresponsive minds. The children are humiliated by the seeming publicity of their faults, and irritated by the silent or whispered delight of their elders, when some pulpit rebuke is especially applicable to them.

Yet children are naturally religious.

On the other hand, the "East End" parents are not satisfied that the instruction given by the Religious Education Board and the voluntary Sabbath-class teachers is adequate to satisfy the spiritual needs of their children, and at the educational conference the fact was generally deplored that these children were still further instructed out of school hours. It is still more deplorable that these very children, who have been subjected to this elaborate religious training, who have attended school and cheder, are found, when they have ceased to be students, and even

during the period of their preparation, to be conscious of no anxiety to pray, of no sense that religion renders truthfulness and self-sacrifice obligatory. With some signal exceptions, the voluntary Sabbath-class teachers consider that they satisfy the claims of religion by insisting on extreme decorum in their class, and instructing it in the recital of prayers which are not felt or understood. The children are not awed by the grandeur of God, nor drawn to him by his love. They merely repeat a weekly lesson, which has become easy through iteration, and which can awaken no spiritual joy.

The members of the Religious Education Board are, doubtless, inspired by the highest motives. They would like to adopt the "East End" religion, and to teach it in an intelligent and enlightened manner, showing that the greater part of the observances are estimable only as methods, never as objects of worship. But the members of the Board belong to the leisured classes, and seem unable to carry out their scheme by personal effort; their own religion is not the "East End" religion, and they cannot impart a fervour for what they do not feel. They depute the work to others, who conscientiously teach religion as geography and history are taught. Consequently, although their pupils come to answer intelligently, the lessons they learn are not assimilated in a manner to influence their everyday life. Religion remains a subject to be noticed at certain specified times and seasons, but has no intimate connexion with life's joys and cares.

The conditions of modern Judaism, then, from every point of view, present a grievous aspect to honest observers. In vain we seek to gloss over facts; in vain we point triumphantly to our charity-lists, to our learning, to our position in the front of every rank and profession. We yet have to confess ourselves unable to impart to our children a strengthening faith. Are we not also becoming every year more self-indulgent, more ostentatious, less reverent? Why is there a growing tendency among all classes of

Jewish youth to forget the serious purposes of life, and to set the pleasures of gain, of dress, of food, of dancing, and of acting, above all else that is desirable on earth? Why do we gamble so much? Why do we grudge personal service in combating the moral evils of our day? Why is complete personal sacrifice to the needs of our poor so rare among us? Why do our philanthropists, even our ministers, forbear to introduce religion into their visiting work, unless to or about those who are about to leave this world? Why cannot we suppress the lying and deceit which flourish in our midst? Why do our friends and relatives marry out of the faith, passing among the Gentiles as freethinkers, upon whom religion has no claim? Why are the old laws, which kept the minds of our fathers in pious subservience, still preserved, seeing that here and there they require a sermon to justify their existence, and a sacrifice of truth to facilitate their observance?

The answer to these questions must be, that the highest Jewish influences are for the time being dormant, and have ceased to inspire our lives; that our belief in a supernatural law is only a verbal one, and that in spite of our professions we are stirred by no desire to prepare ourselves for a better spiritual state. Indeed, without some strong spiritual awakening, how can we hope to arrest our degenerate tendencies?

Yet, in spite of all these depressing facts, in spite of our present callousness and inertia, there is every reason for hope—for hope, glorious and infinite. If we examine our Judaism with a trusting spirit, we find that it still contains the germs of life; we find that its abiding essence is simplicity and truth. At present our thinkers are oppressed by the religious lethargy from which our age is just emerging. Only now and again a true believer appears in our midst, one who clings to his religion, and derives from it spiritual joy and a stimulus to moral progress; who sacrifices his own pleasure constantly in order to serve his fellows; who draws inspiration at all times from God and

from his creations, because *his* Judaism impels it. The problem before us is how to restore confidence to our thinkers, and to encourage them to free our religion from the earth which is clogging it, and to allow it to spread and to stimulate the lives of all generations. There is only one method by which we can hope to achieve these ends. *That method is association.*

When about the year 1840 the Italians became conscious of their state of subjection and determined to issue from it, Giuseppe Mazzini appealed to them to associate together in the service of God and of their country. He saw that only after self-regeneration could his countrymen hope to frustrate tyranny, and that only by association could they obtain the needful strength to execute the tasks before them. Whether it is left for generations yet unborn to inherit the glorious future which Mazzini predicted for his country, or whether the associated bands of young Italy are gone for ever and have left no trace, I still believe that the great Italian's teachings are fundamentally true. We Jews are suffering at home from the tyranny of spiritual sloth, and abroad from the tyranny of persecution. If we are to be free, Mazzini's powerful appeal for association should echo and re-echo in our midst. For his words may be applied to communities as well as to nations, to religious brotherhoods as well as to political states. He says, "Association is a security for progress. The State represents a certain sum or mass of *principles* in which the universality of the citizens are agreed at the time of its foundation. Suppose that a new and true principle, a new and rational development of the truths that have given vitality to the State, should be discovered by a few among its citizens. How should they diffuse the knowledge of the principle except by association? Inertia and a disposition to rest satisfied with the order of things long existing, and sanctioned by the common consent, are habits too powerful over the minds of most men to allow a single individual to overcome them by

his solitary word. The association of a daily increasing minority can do this. Association is the method of the future" (Mazzini, *Duties of Man*).

It is only by association that we can effectually enunciate the principle, that we are required to use in God's service all the gifts of mind and heart which he has granted to us, since it is a form of blasphemy to conceal or to pervert truth, in order to render our service of God acceptable to him. We, who are conscious of our great needs, must organize ourselves into an association to rediscover our Judaism, encouraging one another to reformulate our ideal. We shall be able to rally round us the discontented and weary, and together we may hope to lift Judaism from its desolate position and absorb it into our lives. Together we must sift with all reverence the pure from the impure in the laws which our ancestors formulated in order to satisfy the needs of their age, and refuse to resort to hair-splitting argument in order to re-establish a religion which was originally founded on a basis of truth, dignity and beauty. We must no longer grimly reiterate the fact that Judaism has ceased to appeal to us, and lack the energy to inquire into the cause of its degeneration. We must boldly follow Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and allow a place to progress in religious thought. Yet, at the outset of our search, we shall be persuaded that only the elect among us can worship at the "Fount of Inspiration" without some assistance in the form of a ritualistic system, and that the perpetuation of Judaism therefore requires the maintenance of certain ceremonial observances. For the essence of a religion cannot be transmitted in all its simplicity to a child, whose mind cannot conceive an abstraction, and a certain discipline of observance is essential to character-training. We can only combat our tendency to self-indulgence and to spiritual sloth by having fasts and holydays reserved for communion with God. Inspired by a natural desire to examine with all tenderness the possessions which our fathers preserved with so much courage and devotion, we shall probably find

treasures of beauty and truth where we had expected deformity and deception. We shall then be able to assign to observances, which had been worshipped as the end, their proper place and function as means for the attainment of holiness.

Judaism once rediscovered, and our faith in its utility revived, we shall be able to undertake with better heart the instruction of our children. One of our first duties as an organized association must be to arrange children's services throughout the kingdom. We have to teach our children first to "seek the Lord, while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near"; and, secondly, that "our thoughts are not his thoughts, nor our ways his ways" (Isa. lv. 6, 8). We must make them realize that God is Love, and that human love which bridges life and death, is only a reflection of divine love, which reaches from heaven to earth. The lesson of God's omnipresence may be best enforced by a constant variety of service, and by the introduction of passing events and the incidents of daily life as themes for prayer. It might certainly be urged that a constantly varying service during childhood would render any fixed ritual irksome in after life. But with the growth of judgment the necessity for some uniformity in worship will be felt. Our children have to learn that prayer involves *effort*. If they could see their leader moved by spiritual need, struggling to approach his God, they would unconsciously join in the search, and experience veneration in the presence of God. From the beginning, the value of prayer in combating vicious pleasures and the neglect of truth must be enforced. The children must learn that the active, conscious search after God cannot be confined to morning and evening prayer, nor begun and ended on Sabbaths and festivals. The believing Jew and Jewess must seek guidance from God in the morning, be conscious of his presence throughout the day, and pray for a renewed inspiration at night. Then Judaism will have gained through fervent prayer far more

than it can have lost through less regard for form ; and its professing followers will look to it once more to satisfy some definite need in their lives.

As an association, we must prove the utility of our religion by showing that it admits of endless development. We must prove that we are not a destructive body, and that we did not chafe because we required more ease ; for while waging a crusade against deceit and impurity, we are only seeking to restore to Judaism its power over our lives. We must avoid all boasting and ostentation ; even as our aim is high, so should our self-distrust be great. It is obvious how inadequate is our strength to achieve even a small part of the purpose we have in view, seeing that our generation, however united and zealous it may become, can only indicate the road which posterity may think it right to follow.

I have suggested the organization of an associated band of worshippers, bound together by the tenets of a living Judaism. It is possible to attempt a slight forecast of the lines on which such an association may work and its more immediate results. We may hope for the gradual abandonment of gambling and other vicious pleasures, the desire for a more simple life animated by love of truth and of piety, and an increase in the number and devotion of those who are ready to devote themselves to preventive rather than curative social work, and who would attempt relief by moral stimuli, as well as by material props. The present is the right hour, and England is the fit place for the initiation of this movement, which may restore to Judaism its glory.

In England Jews can freely develop all their powers, and follow, unquestioned, their ideals. If, then, the English Jews are better able than most of their continental brothers to recognize the potentiality of their spiritual inheritance, the obligation rests imperatively upon them to formulate its meaning and render it intelligible. By continuing to follow mechanically a religion which they have

not the energy to revive, by maintaining tenets which jar on their sense of truth, they are neglecting their most urgent duties, and rendering themselves for ever unfit to serve their brothers. For we English Jews owe a duty to our less fortunate co-religionists, who are still suffering from the effects of persecution. In some countries we find Jews who have been denied the advantages of education, for whom persecution has tightened the spiritual bonds by causing them to build up a wall of observance effectually shutting out God's light. They are dimly conscious of a glorious inheritance transmitted to them by their fathers, and threatened by cruel and impious strangers. Too fearful to examine the nature of this inheritance, and to discover that its qualities defy the art of thieves, they fence it with rows of bulwarks constructed with pious ingenuity. Holy is the aim of the persecuted; there is no schism or rebellion in their midst; they do not understand that their service has been gradually diverted from the Giver of all good to the ritual gods, who were originally raised on high for the purpose of his defence. But when persecution ceases, and men are freed from its effects, they will examine the nature of the ritual gods they have served so conscientiously. A revulsion of feeling, a horror at their long idolatry may follow; tradition may lose its purifying hold over their minds, and they may yield themselves up to licence, and call it intellectual emancipation. It is possible for us in England to avert this catastrophe. At the moment when our persecuted brethren are in their greatest need, when they realize the hollowness of their worship, they may be saved from spiritual anarchy if they see among us a religion comprising all that was valuable and lovely in the ancient faith, embodied in forms acceptable to emancipated minds.

In other countries we see Jews who, having once known intellectual freedom, are now denied the privilege of developing all their intellectual, social and material possessions, unless they submit to conditions which will

rob them of their Judaism. For a long time they may refuse to accept these conditions, although, like their less enlightened brothers, they have probably not examined the purport of their religious inheritance. They are at present restrained from doing so by vanity rather than by piety, for they vaguely believe that their ancient faith, the source of so much of their fathers' glory, will not survive a severe scrutiny. Their attempts to suppress intelligence result in a lifeless form of worship, and, in all probability, the scruples which made the preservation of a religious system at all possible will gradually melt away before the claims of self-advancement. The religion which has long ceased to inspire love will be at last critically examined, and contempt for it will fill the minds of its former devotees; its merits over other religions will appear doubtful, and men will resolve no longer to cramp their own and their children's lives in its cause. Consideration for the children's happiness will probably be most potent in inducing the change to be made, and even if the state religion is not formally adopted, the old religion will no longer block the road to success.

These gloomy prophecies are warranted by many precedents in the history of continental Judaism; but I believe that, if in England we associate to maintain Jewish ideals, we shall be able to show by the gladness and the holiness of our lives that Judaism is worth *any* sacrifice. Then the persecuted will renew their courage, and be saved from deserting the religion whose value is proved before their eyes.

Surely we English Jews can have no excuse for continued indifference and waiting. To us the call is clear and unmistakable. For our own sakes we must revive Judaism, and having reconciled its dogma with our highest conception of truth and beauty, allow it again to bind us to the God who cares for us. In order to answer the challenge of the "East End Jew," we must prove that our faith is no longer comatose, that we are truly striving

after an ideal, and that we are ready to make any sacrifice that our religion may claim. For the sake of our foreign brothers, whose eyes are blinded by present misery from seeing the light which is within their reach, we English Jews must unite to strengthen our faith and proclaim the infinite hope contained within it.

There is everything to fear for the future of Judaism, until it can be accepted by the most enlightened among us. Better to have died in the Ghetto than to have outlived the possibilities of our religion. But surely there is no need for despair seeing that a broader and more beautiful worship, which will grow in intensity, as the needs of a more developed civilization become greater, can even now be dimly foreshadowed.

Some critics are fond of noticing the popularity of Ghetto, or hard-shelled, Jews among the Gentiles, and comparing it with the odium suffered by the unobservant Jews. We cannot hide from ourselves one reason at any rate for such a preference. The Ghetto Jews need not be feared as rivals, since their development is checked by laws of their own making, while the emancipated Jews are without binding laws, and therefore uncramped in their competition with their neighbours. The racial Jew, devoted to self-seeking and ostentation, and arrogant of his race, although destitute of spiritual faith, is indeed deserving of every scorn. His Judaism is not of his own seeking, and he consequently makes no sacrifice to follow it; he cherishes a materialistic ideal, which threatens the highest good of our age. It is the Jew who is a racial Jew only who must be helped to religious Judaism once more by being induced to join an association intent on proving the value of the religion for which his fathers lived and died. And if such a band, doing such glorious work, should reawaken intolerance among our neighbours, we are prepared to welcome martyrdom and to call it a joyous deliverance, seeing that it will have freed us from the lethargy which is at present oppressing our spirits. If, as is far more probable, we are

able by a strongly organized religious movement to arrest our own spiritual degeneration and to revive our faith, that mission of the Lord's Servant unto the nations, which was the highest aspiration of the Second Isaiah, may even yet be turned from a vision into reality.

But before we Jews can claim to be a religious brotherhood, before we can pretend to possess a faith through which we can speak tidings of salvation and peace to all nations, we must be able to rest our title on our own efforts rather than on the accident of our birth. Whatever the creed of his father, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant or Jewish, a religious man must seek and discover God for himself. I believe that in Judaism will be found the methods by which God can be most surely approached, and that these methods are certain ultimately to prevail universally. But no fresh discovery can be made exactly on the lines of the past; the temperament of one generation differs from that of another, and life is only possible when it can adapt itself to environment. Let us dare to speak with courage to our brothers and sisters, and to our sons and daughters; let us bid them not hesitate in their search after the divine, because they use data and methods not already tried by their ancestors. Judaism is strong enough and wide enough to inspire them and their children for ever; let us ask them to make progressive demands upon it. Let us tell them indeed that they can *only* be Jews and Jewesses if they *do* live up to the ideals of truth and morality expounded by the best teachers of their age.

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